

Message Text

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PAGE 01 PARIS 27288 01 OF 02 152010Z

44

ACTION EUR-12

INFO OCT-01 ARA-06 ISO-00 CIAE-00 DODE-00 PM-03 H-01

INR-05 L-02 NSAE-00 NSC-05 PA-01 RSC-01 PRS-01 SP-02

SS-15 USIA-06 COME-00 EB-04 LAB-01 SIL-01 OMB-01

CIEP-01 HEW-02 DOTE-00 NIC-01 /072 W

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R 152056Z NOV 74

FM AMEMBASSY PARIS

TO SECSTATE WASHDC 4280

INFO AMEMBASSY BONN

AMEMBASSY BRUSSELS

USMISSION EC BRUSSELS

AMEMBASSY COPENHAGEN

AMEMBASSY THE HAGUE

AMEMBASSY LONDON

AMEMBASSY LUXEMBOURG

AMEMBASSY ROME

AMEMBASSY STOCKHOLM

AMCONSUL BORDEAUX

AMCONSUL LYON

AMCONSUL MARSEILLE

AMCONSUL MARTINIQUE

AMCONSUL NICE

AMCONSUL STRASBOURG

LIMITED OFFICIAL USE SECTION 01 OF 02 PARIS 27288

E.O. 11652: N/A

TAGS: PLAB, FR

SUBJECT: FRENCH LABOR SCENE

1. SUMMARY. CGT-CFDT HAVE CALLED FOR A "NATIONAL DAY OF ACTION" ON 19 NOVEMBER TO PROTEST GROWING UNEMPLOYMENT RESULTING FROM GOF AUSTERITY PROGRAM. LOCAL UNIONS ARE TO DECIDE WHAT ACTION TO TAKE AND
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PAGE 02 PARIS 27288 01 OF 02 152010Z

SO FAR ONLY SNCF (RAILROADS) AND METRO HAVE ANNOUNCED

CUTS IN SERVICE. GOF ATTENTIVE BUT FAIRLY RELAXED IN BELIEF SHARED BY EMBASSY THAT CGT OBJECTIVE IS NOT TO CHALLENGE THE REGIME BUT TO ASSERT ITS DOMINANT POSITION IN LABOR MOVEMENT. NEVERTHELESS CURRENT LABOR AGITATION AND BITE OF ANTI-INFLATION PROGRAM RENDER BEHAVIOR OF RANK AND FILE INCREASINGLY UNPREDICTABLE. END SUMMARY.

2. LABOR SCENE REMAINS CONFUSED AND AGITATED AS CGT-CFDT MAKE PREPARATIONS TO BRING SITUATION TO A CLIMAX BY CALLING FOR A "NATIONAL DAY OF ACTION" ON 19 NOVEMBER. CGT-CFDT CAREFULLY AND DELIBERATELY AVOIDED USE OF TERM "GENERAL STRIKE" WHICH IMPLIES SIMULTANEOUS NATION-WIDE STRIKES IN ALL SECTORS OF THE ECONOMY. IT IMPLIES ALSO A POLITICAL MOTIVATION WHICH CGT-CFDT ARE CATEGORICALLY DENYING TO ESCAPE CRITICAL REACTION FROM PUBLIC OPINION. INSTEAD CGT-CFDT HAVE LEFT IT TO LOCAL UNIONS' DISCRETION TO DECIDE WHETHER TO STRIKE AND FOR HOW LONG WITHIN PRESET 24-HOUR LIMIT. MARCHES ARE ALSO PLANNED IN ALL MAJOR CITIES TO SUPPORT DEMANDS FOR HIGHER MINIMUM WAGES AND COST OF LIVING INCREASES, AND TO PROTEST GROWING UNEMPLOYMENT RESULTING FROM GOF AUSTERITY PROGRAM.

3. SO FAR FOLLOWING STRIKE ACTIONS HAVE BEEN CALLED BY CGT-CFDT UNIONS:

(A) SNCF (RAILROADS) ROTATING REGIONAL STRIKES OVER 4-DAY PERIOD 18-23 NOVEMBER. OBSERVERS PUZZLED BY NEW ATTEMPT TO STRIKE SNCF IN VIEW OF NOTABLE FAILURE OF SIMILAR STRIKE WEEK 7 NOVEMBER. MATIGNON ADVISER TOLD LABATT THAT CGT IS COUNTING THIS TIME ON INDEPENDENT LOCOMOTIVE ENGINEERS UNION TO JOIN STRIKE AND THUS ASSURE ITS SUCCESS. GOF AND SNCF MANAGEMENT ARE SEEKING TO PREVENT THIS.

(B) METRO. 24-HOUR STRIKE ON 19 NOVEMBER. SIMILAR CALL FOR 9 NOVEMBER REMAINED SINGULARLY UNHEEDED BY METRO WORKERS.
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PAGE 03 PARIS 27288 01 OF 02 152010Z

(C) PUBLIC SERVICE. POSSIBLE 24-HOUR STRIKE ON 19 NOVEMBER. RESULTS OF TWO-DAY STRIKE (13-14 NOVEMBER) BY PUBLIC SERVICE NOT PARTICULARLY ENCOURAGING FOR ORGANIZERS OF NATION-WIDE SHOW OF STRENGTH. PARTICIPATION RATE VARIED 5-25 PERCENT, LOWEST IN MANY YEARS.

(D) PRESS. ONE-DAY STRIKE 13 NOVEMBER BY CGT-
CONTROLLED PRINTERS UNION PREVENTED PUBLICATION OF
NEWSPAPERS. UNLIKELY UNION WILL REPEAT PERFORMANCE
ON 19 NOVEMBER.

4. FO, FEN (NATIONAL EDUCATION UNIONS)' CFTC AND
CGC (CADRES) ARE REFUSING TO ASSOCIATE THEMSELVES WITH
19 NOVEMBER STRIKES PARTLY BECAUSE THEY CONSIDER
(CORRECTLY) THAT ONE OF CGT-CFDT UNAVOWED PURPOSES
IS TO UNDERMINE COLLECTIVE BARGAINING PROCESS TO
WHICH FO AND THE OTHERS ARE COMMITTED AS EVIDENCED
BY NUMBER OF 1974 CONTRACTS THEY HAVE SIGNED IN
PUBLIC AND NATIONALIZED SECTORS.

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PAGE 01 PARIS 27288 02 OF 02 152013Z

44

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LIMITED OFFICIAL USE SECTION 02 OF 02 PARIS 27288

5. GOF IS FOLLOWING SITUATION ATTENTIVELY (POLICE EVACUATION OF PTT PREMISES BEING REPORTED SEPTTEL). IT ACTS AS THOUGH IT HAD ANTICIPATED THAT SOONER OR LATER AUSTERITY PROGRAM WOULD CREATE DISCONTENT. IN FACT ELYSEE SOCIAL ADVISER TOLD LABATT THAT IT IS LIMITED OFFICIAL USE

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PAGE 02 PARIS 27288 02 OF 02 152013Z

PERHAPS A GOOD THING THAT THIS CONFRONTATION IS TAKING PLACE AT THIS POINT AND NOT LATER WHEN RATE OF UNEMPLOYMENT MAY EDGE TOWARD 800'000 FIGURE. HENCE, GOF DETERMINATION TO STAND FIRM AND TO REFUSE WAGE INCREASES IN PUBLIC AND NATIONALIZED SECTORS BY ANY OTHER MEANS THAN REGULAR COLLECTIVE BARGAINING PROCESS TO COVER 1975 PERIOD. ONLY CONCESSION GOF PREPARED TO MAKE WAS AGREEMENT TO BEGIN NEGOTIATIONS IN DECEMBER INSTEAD OF JANUARY-FEBRUARY AS WAS DONE IN PREVIOUS YEARS. THIS CONCESSION PAID OFF HANDSOMELY SINCE IT LED TO FEN DECISION TO DISSOCIATE ITSELF FROM 19 NOVEMBER STRIKES.

6. HOWEVER, GOF HAS NOT BEEN PARTICULARLY EFFECTIVE IN PUTTING ITS POINT OF VIEW ACROSS TO THE PUBLIC. OVERCONFIDENCE AND LACK OF PROPER ORGANIZATION TO HANDLE THE MEDIA SEEM TO ACCOUNT FOR THIS. ELYSEE CONSIDERED A TV ADDRESS BY GISCARD EVENING 14 NOVEMBER BUT FAL DECISION WAS TO WAIT UNTIL SHORTLY AFTER 19 NOVEMBER TO TAKE INTO ACCOUNT RESULTS ON THAT DAY OF CGT-CFDT MOBILIZATION EFFORTS.

7. GOF FAIRLY RELAXED ATTITUDE IS SUSTAINED BY FOLLOWING CONSIDERATIONS:

(A) ALTHOUGH CGT-CFDT REPRESENT MAJORITY OF ORGANIZED LABOR THEIR MOTIVES ARE FREQUENTLY SUSPECT IN THE EYES OF MAJORITY UNORGANIZED WORKERS.

(B) AS NOTED ABOVE, RECENT EXPERIENCE OF CGT-CFDT STRIKE CALLS HAVE SHOWN THAT PROVERBIAL "COMMON SENSE" OF FRENCH WORKER IS STILL A REALITY.

(C) CGT-CFDT (ESPECIALLY THE FORMER) HAVE BEEN EXTREMELY CAREFUL IN THE LANGUAGE OF THEIR SLOGANS STRESSING NEED FOR NEGOTIATIONS TO REACH A COMPROMISE SETTLEMENT ON WORKERS' DEMANDS.

(D) EVIDENCE THAT DESPITE APPARENT CGT-CFDT UNITY, THEIR IDEOLOGICAL AND POLITICAL RIVALRY REMAINS INTENSE.

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PAGE 03 PARIS 27288 02 OF 02 152013Z

(E) FEARFUL OF UNEMPLOYMENT, WORKERS IN PRIVATE SECTOR ARE TURNING DEAF EARS TO CGT-CFDT STRIKE RHETORIC. THIS ATTITUDE IS STRENGTHENED BY FACT THAT SUBSTANTIAL WAGE INCREASES GIVEN BY THE EMPLOYERS HAVE MORE THAN COMPENSATED EROSION OF WAGES PURCHASING POWER THROUGH INFLATION.

8. IN ADDITION GOF (AND EMBASSY) BELIEVE THAT AT LEAST AS FAR AS CGT IS CONCERNED POLITICAL PURPOSE OF CURRENT AGITATION IS NOT TO CHALLENGE THE REGIME BUT TO REAFFIRM ITS CLAIM AS ONLY TRUE DEFENDER OF WORKERS' INTERESTS AND TO DEMONSTRATE ITS DOMINANT POSITION IN LABOR MOVEMENT. SEEN IN THIS LIGHT, CGT ACTIONS PARALLEL THOSE OF PCF IN RECENT WEEKS WHEN IT SOUGHT TO ASSERT ITS PRIMACY IN THE UNITED LEFT BY TAKING TO TASK THE SOCIALIST PARTY ON A NUMBER OF IDEOLOGICAL AND PROGRAMATIC ISSUES.

9. COMMENT. NOTWITHSTANDING THE FOREGOING, THE FACT REMAINS THAT THE LABOR SCENE IS MARKED BY INCREASED AGITATION WHICH IF NOTHING ELSE NARROWS CONSIDERABLY THE GOVERNMENT'S MARGIN OF ERROR IN HANDLING INDIVIDUAL SITUATIONS AND COPING WITH POTENTIAL INCIDENTS. EVACUATION BY POLICE OF PTT PREMISES ILLUSTRATES THE TYPE OF RISKS WHICH GOF MUST CAREFULLY CALCULATE IN ADVANCE. AS THE AUSTERITY PROGRAM AFFECTS JOB SECURITY AND STANDARDS OF LIVING, RANK AND FILE BEHAVIOR INEVITABLY WILL BECOME INCREASINGLY UNPREDICTABLE.

RUSH

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